Carter Peanut Warehouse Complex
Southeast corner of Main and Bond streets
Plains
Sumter County
Georgia

HABS No. GA-2202

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

CARTER PEANUT WAREHOUSE COMPLEX

HABS No. GA-2202

Location: Southeast corner Main and Bond streets, Plains, Sumter County, Georgia.

USGS Plains Georgia Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: Zone 16, E 746270 N 3546945.

Present Owner: Archer-Daniels-Midland Company, Decatur, Illinois.

Present Occupant: Golden Peanut Company.

Present Use: Seed peanut warehouse.

Significance: When his father died in 1953, Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, returned to Plains to run the family peanut business. After making less than $200 profit during a difficult first year, they expanded the business until it averaged $2.5 million annually. Carter's younger brother, Billy, purchased 15 percent of the business after he returned from the U.S. Marine Corps, and oversaw its management as Jimmy became more involved in politics. The company was put into a blind trust when Jimmy Carter became U.S. president. Following his presidency, the Carters sold it for about $1.2 million.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Office, 1961; see Outbuildings for additional buildings on site and erection dates.

2. Architect: The firm of Hugh Gaston designed the office. Gaston was born in Gastonburg, Alabama, in 1924 and was educated at Auburn University. A member of the Georgia chapter of the American Institute of Architects, most of Gaston's buildings are located in Georgia.[1] Gaston also designed the Carter's house on Woodland Drive in 1961, the Pond House in 1967, and the 1978 addition to the Plains Convalescent Home, formerly the Wise Sanitorium. In the 1980s, Gaston dropped out of the public scene and moved to Lebanon, Tennessee.

3. Original and subsequent owners: The following is a chain of title to the land on which the structures stand. Deed books are from the Clerk's Office, Sumter County Courthouse, Americus, Georgia.

[1] American Architect's Directory, p. 240.

1951 Deed, August 21, 1951, Deed Book 40, page 352. J. Frank Myers, trustee in bankruptcy for Supro Products, Inc. to James Earl Carter.

1981 Deeds, October 1, 1981, Deed Book 194, page 253-257. Five deeds record sale from James Earl Carter, Ruth Carter Stapleton, Lillian Carter, Gloria Carter Spann, and William Alton Carter to Archer-Daniels-Midland Company, a Delaware corporation.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Ralph Wiggins of Plains, the general contractor for the office, also constructed several other structures on the site. Jimmy Carter designed a large corn warehouse near the railroad which was later torn down to erect the present metal peanut storage facility on the site (see Outbuildings, k), the large wood warehouse (d.) and the shelling plant (i).

5. Original plans and construction: None have been located.

6. Alterations and additions: Additions to office: In 1976-81 a concrete-block addition was erected in back of the office to house additional office space and a meeting room; in 1986 a concrete-block addition was erected on the south side of office with a grading room and kitchenette.

See Outbuildings for additions to the complex and Supplimental Material for their locations.

B. Historical Context: Peanuts are the largest cash crop grown in Sumter County; the state of Georgia alone produces between 40 to 50 percent of all of the peanuts produced in the United States. Actually a legume, rather than a nut, the peanuts were exported to Europe from the southeastern states as early as the 1700s. Peanuts replaced cotton as the major crop in the region after the devastation of the boll weevil. Many uses for the peanut were discovered by George Washington Carver, who emphasized the ability of the nitrogen-producing plant to replenish the nutrients lost in the soil after years of cotton production. Jimmy Carter was a peanut enthusiast even as a child and fondly remembers helping his father grow them on the farm at Archery.[2] His business prowess was honed at an early age when he sold boiled peanuts in downtown Plains on weekends. His father, Earl Carter, was also a creative business entrepreneur and came up with the idea of marketing peanuts for the farmers in the area by serving as a wholesale agent. He purchased the east half of the Wellons Building on Main Street in 1943 (see HABS No. GA-2216) and ran his business from there.

When Jimmy Carter left home in 1943 to attend the U.S. Naval Academy, it appeared that his younger brother, Billy, was destined to inherit the

[2] Jimmy Carter, Why Not the Best?, 1975.

business. But when Earl Carter died unexpectedly of cancer in 1953, Billy was still a teenager, so Jimmy left the Navy (one of the most difficult decisions of his life) and returned to Plains, after an 11-year absence to take over the business. The property was to be divided equally among the four children, Jimmy, Billy, Gloria, and Ruth, and their mother, Lillian. Jimmy, the executor of the will, divided all of the property into five parts of relatively equal value. At first, Jimmy and Lillian were equal partners. Later, when Billy Carter returned from the Marine Corps, he purchased 15% of the business.

The peanut business varies greatly with the seasons. Seed peanuts, fertilizers and supplies are sold to the farmers in the spring; in the fall, the peanuts grown from the seed are bought back to be processed, packaged, and sold for peanut products including roasted and salted nuts, peanut oil, peanut butter and candy.[3] The investment that is made each spring is not paid off until the crops are harvested in the fall, and the first year Jimmy headed the business, Georgia suffered one of its worst droughts. The company made a total of $187.00. At that point, Rosalynn recalls, Jimmy was doing everything from buying and selling the seed and fertilizer, doing the paperwork, and loading and unloading the harvests from the trucks. Rosalynn initially helped by answering the telephones, but soon she began keeping the books, which she learned by taking classes on bookkeeping at a nearby college.[4]

Together the Carters watched the business thrive. In 1956, there were two large warehouses on the property and the office was located in a warehouse on Hudson Street. By 1962, the current office had been constructed, as well as a large wood and metal warehouse, a 70'-0" x 120'-0" drying warehouse, a shelling plant, and a cotton gin.[5] The shelling plant was the first of its kind in Plains; Jimmy Carter designed much of it himself, with the help of P.J. Wise who did the wiring. The Carters diversified the business, producing cotton, corn products and liquid nitrogen, and investing as much as $100,000 per year into improvements.[6] The company was a family effort that extended to the Carter's sons, Jack, Chip, and Jeff. The business was not without complications, however. The Carters almost considered leaving Plains when a boycott was organized against the firm after Jimmy Carter refused to join the White Citizen's Council in Plains. Although reputedly every white male in Plains had joined, including many of the warehouse's customers, Carter would not endorse the racist organization, even when the members offered to pay his dues for him. The boycott proved to be unsuccessful, however, and the incident had

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[3] Clarence Welch, 1989 interview.

[4] Rosalynn Carter, First Lady From Plains, 1981, pp. 39-40.

[5] U.S. Dept. of Agriculture aerial photographs, 1962.

[6] Mazlish and Diamond, Jimmy Carter, A Character Portait, 1979, p. 125.

little effect on the business.[7]

Meanwhile, Jimmy Carter became more and more involved in politics; and in 1963, Billy Carter returned to Plains from the Marine Corps to help run the company with his wife, Sybil. During the harvest season, the warehouse was one of the major employers in the town;[8] current operations supervisor Clarence Welch, who began working for the firm in 1971, recalled it fondly as a business with a heart, "It was like working for family."[9]

When Carter became president, the company was put into a blind trust and its name was changed to Goldkist. The business was sold in 1981 to the Archer-Daniels-Midland Corporation (ADM) based in Decatur, Illinois. It is now leased to the Golden Peanut Company, which has plants throughout the South. At the time of the sale, the business included twenty-one structures on the property at the corner of Bond and Main streets.[10] The cotton gin was sold while the company was in the blind trust and ADM converted the building that housed it into another warehouse. They also constructed several large grain silos and tore down one of the frame warehouses erected by the Carters.

Currently, the warehouse deals in seed peanuts, buying as many as 2,000 tons per year and storing about 11,000 tons, although commercial peanuts are sometimes stored in the large warehouses. The shelling plant designed by Jimmy Carter was used for the last time in spring 1989 because ADM found that shelling peanuts at some of their larger plants was more profitable than continuing to employ this smaller-scale operation.[11]

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This flat-roofed office is constructed from glass, wood, and masonry and reflects minimalistic contemporary design characteristics.

2. Condition of fabric: Very good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: This one-story, side-facing T-plan building was

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[7] Carter, 1975, pp. 66-67.

[8] Sybil Carter, 1989 interview.

[9] Welch, 1989 interview.

[10] Tax assessment, 1981.

[11] Welch, 1989 interview.

expanded over the years as business required. The original section is approximately 42' x 28' with a covered porch on the north portion of the west facade. In the center of the north facade of the original block, a 10'-9" bay projects 2'-6" from wall. A 22'-7' x 27'-6" addition was made to the east facade of the original block forming a continuous north facade of about 64'. Another 20' x 30' addition was made on the south facade of the building 15' back from the original west facade.

2. Foundations: Concrete block.

3. Walls: The walls are clad with three different materials: concrete block, common-bond brick veneer over concrete block, and brown vertical tongue-and-groove panels over concrete block. All walls on the south and east additions, as well as the south wall of the original block, have concrete-block walls painted dark brown.

4. Structural system, framing: Load-bearing concrete block.

5. Porches, stoops: On the north side of the west/front facade is a covered porch supported by three brick piers. A concrete stoop runs across the north quarter of the east facade and is approached by three concrete steps in front of the door in the fifth bay. Another three-riser concrete stoop leads to the door in the third bay of this facade.

6. Openings:

   a. Doorways and doors: A flush hollow-core door in the fifth bay of the north facade, adjacent to the projecting bay, leads to the reception area. A single glass door adjacent to the three fixed-light windows on the west facade also leads to the reception area. Two hollow-core flush doors in the third and fifth bays of the east facade lead from the office to the warehouse area.

   b. Windows: A bank of four fixed display-like windows glaze the northwest corner of the office; one light on the north face, three in the west. Three fixed lights are in the projecting bay on the north facade. There is a band of three one-over-one-light windows in the third bay of the north facade adjacent of the projecting bay and a pair of two-over-two-light double-hung sash in the first bay of the east facade. All of the remaining exterior windows are single two-over-two-light double-hung sash in aluminum frames.

7. Roof

   a. Shape, covering: The flat roof is covered with tar and gravel.

b. Cornice, eaves: The broad flat edges of the roof have wide eaves.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The original block consists of a large reception area in the northwest corner with an L-shaped counter. Two offices are on the south wall of this original block. A hall leads east from here to the east addition. On the north side of this hall is an enclosed room with glazing all around, the windows on the east wall formerly being exterior windows. A hall runs south along the once-exterior brick wall with a door on the north end leading to a meeting room in the northeast corner of the building. Another office is on the east side of the hall which leads to the quality control room in the south addition.

2. Flooring: A linoleum-tile floor covers the reception area, hall and government-inspection room. Offices are carpeted.

3. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls in the original section are mostly vertical tongue-and-groove wood panels over concrete block. On the west and north walls of the reception area, the concrete-block wall is exposed. The offices and break room in the east part of the building have modern sheet panel walls. The government-inspection room has concrete-block walls. The west walls of the large meeting room and the south-running hall are brick because they were once exterior walls.

4. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: All interior doors are flush hollow-core.

b. Windows: A large fixed window is on the north wall of the front office looking into the reception area. The office between the reception area and the back office is surrounded by a wall containing fixed windows. The center window on the east facade is a single-hung sash, and windows between this area and the rear meeting room are a band of three one-over-one-light awning windows, which were originally on the exterior.

5. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: Electric heat blower and central-air-conditioning unit.

b. Lighting: Fluorescent strip ceiling fixtures.

c. Plumbing: The men's and women's bathrooms each contain a

sink and a toilet. The employee lounge also has a sink.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The Peanut Warehouse office faces west onto Bond Street in the northwest corner of the property. Several other buildings and structures are located south and east of the office.

2. Outbuildings (See attached site plan):

a. Peanut sampler shed: Located about 50' due east of the office is a peanut sampler. A tall, corrugated-metal gable roof supported on four metal poles covers the area where the peanut trucks park. The sampler is suspended above the parking area on a bridge and carriage under the roof. The sampler tube can be moved on the bridge and carriage over the parked trucks and lowered to take a core sample of the peanuts to be graded. The shed was purchased from Butler Buildings, Butler, Georgia.

b. Grain silos: Three grain silos stand north of the sampler shed along the north edge of the property. These cylindrical metal structures were constructed after 1981 by the Archer-Daniels-Midland Company and are no longer in use. Originally there were three silos, but one fell down.

c. Shop building: This wood frame, standing-seam metal shed located east of the sampler was built after 1981 by ADM is used as a repair shop.

d. Wood warehouse: Built by Jimmy Carter around 1959, this 200' x 60' rectangular building is situated along the southwest edge of the property and can hold 3,700 tons of peanuts. Ralph Wiggins, who built it with Carter, explained that the slope of the warehouse roof was determined by measuring the slope of a pile of peanuts as they fell naturally. That slope was duplicated in the roof "so the warehouse fills itself by gravity."[12] Five wood partitions permit the storage of several varieties of peanuts. Constructed of vertical board-and-batten homosote walls, the structure is supported by tall unhewn posts placed 6' on center along the exterior walls and about 10' apart on the interior supporting the roof. A conveyor belt that runs the length of the raised "doghouse" in the monitor roof is fed in a loading area located under a shed roof on the east side of the building.

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[12] Ralph Wiggins, 1989 interview.

Although most warehouses are now constructed of metal, wood ones such as this are better for peanut storage because they allow for greater ventilation. This warehouse was repaired after a fire destroyed part of its roof in March 1975.

e. 70' x 120' drying shed: Originally built by the Carters in the late 1950s, this structure was used as a drying shed. It is constructed of corrugated metal with I-beam supports and is illuminated by skylights. Peanuts are moist when they are first removed from the ground and the water content must be reduced to less than 10 percent before they can be marketed. The peanuts are dried with large blower units attached to the carts in which the farmers load them. This warehouse is now used to store peanut hulls. A large pipe connected to the shelling plant sucks up the hulls, which are then bagged and sold for a variety of uses, such as animal feed filler, kitty litter, and as an ingredient for pressed fire logs.

f. 80' x 100' drying shed: This metal front-facing gable shed in the southeast corner of the property was built between 1962 and 1968 and also served as a drying shed. It is constructed of corrugated metal with I-beam supports and is illuminated by skylights. Peanuts are treated with a pink insecticide chemical in this warehouse.

g. 300' drying shed: This shed was erected at the far east end of the property after 1981. Consisting of a gable roof supported on metal poles, the peanut wagons are parked under the roof and connected to the large dryers located down the center of the shed. The wagons have a screen on the bottom and the blowers push air into the bottom of the wagon, under the screens, to remove the water from the peanuts above. The shed was moved to the back of the property, away from the residential area on Bond Street, because it is extremely loud when all the dryers are operating.

h. Cotton gin: This 40' x 120' cross-gable building was constructed in the northeast corner of the property to house a cotton gin. Although cotton was once a major crop in Sumter County, it has given way to peanuts. The gin was sold when the company was operated by a blind trust during Carter's presidency, and the basement where the hydraulic cylinders were located has been filled in. A side-facing gable addition was added to the back of the building in 1981, and the structure is now used to store the peanuts that are ready to be shipped. The structure is illuminated by fluorescent lights; a timed insect-control system in the ceiling

emits insecticide at intervals to protect the product.

i. Peanut sheller: Adjacent to the cotton gin, on the west, is a large shelling plant built by the Carters in 1975. The 50' x 161' corrugated-metal structure is almost entirely filled with the peanut-shelling equipment. Along the west wall are a row of offices, a quality-control room and an employee lunchroom. The shelling process, which is done mostly in the fall, requires twenty-one workers per shift. The plant can shell 12 to 15 tons of peanuts per hour. As the peanuts go through the sheller, the largest are the first to lose their shells; the peanuts must fit through smaller and smaller spaces until even the smallest peanut is shelled. The hulls, which weigh less, are sucked into tubes that transfer them to the hull-storage warehouse. The hulled peanuts are then passed single file through machines that sort out the irregular peanuts using an electric eye. Until 1980, much of this peanut sorting was done manually. Even though each peanut travels single file, each apparatus can sort 600 pounds of peanuts per hour. The shelling plant includes thirty electric-eye machines. The irregular peanuts are used to make peanut oil.

j. Storage silos: Behind the shelling plant on the north are four cylindrical metal silos for the storage of farmer's stock peanuts (unprocessed).

k. Large metal warehouse: Adjacent to the shelling plant on the west is an 80' x 160' corrugated-metal warehouse with a monitor roof, which can hold 5,500 tons of peanuts. I-beams placed 10' on center on the walls and 20' on center on the roof support the gable-roofed structure. The monitor roof houses a conveyor belt that runs the length of the warehouse.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original Architectural Drawings: None have been located.

B. Early Views: Department of Agriculture aerial photographs: 1953, 1956, 1962, 1968, 1975, 1981.

C. Interviews:

Sybil Carter, interview by Elizabeth Barthold, August 31, 1989. Plains, Georgia.

Clarence R. Welch, Golden Peanut Company operations supervisor, interview by Elizabeth Barthold, August 7, 1989, Plains, Georgia.

Ralph Wiggins, general contractor, interview by Elizabeth Barthold, August 23, 1989, Plains, Georgia.

D. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Carter, Jimmy, letter dated September 15, 1989.

Deed Books, Clerk's Office, Sumter County Courthouse, Americus, Georgia.

Real Property Record, Tax Assessor's Office, Sumter County Courthouse, Americus, Georgia.

2. Secondary and published sources:

American Architect's Directory, edited by George S. Koyl, New York: R.R. Bowker Co., 1962.

Barrett, Leila, "Fire Damages Carter Warehouse in Plains," The Americus Times Recorder, March 22, 1975.

Carter, Jimmy, Why Not the Best?, Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1975.

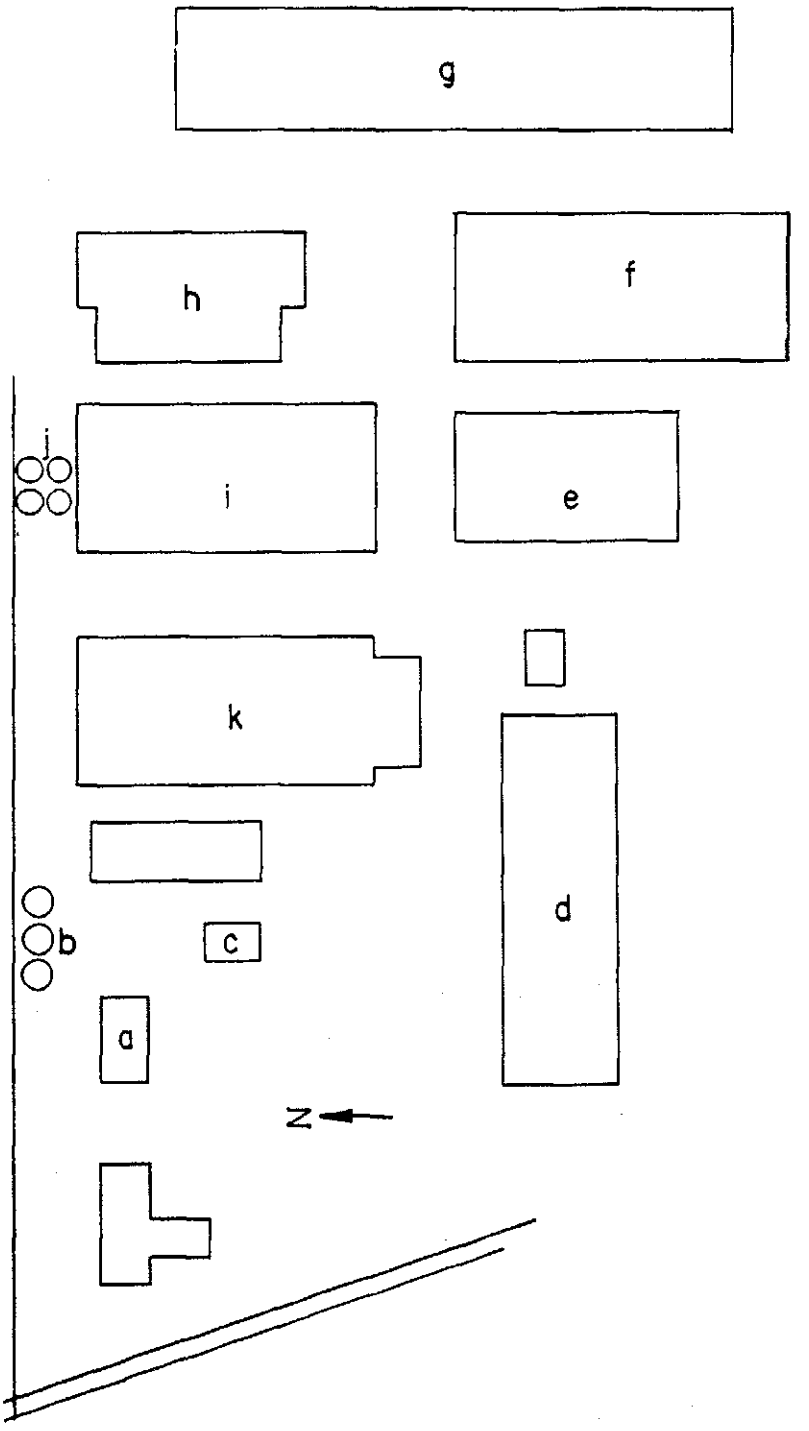
Carter, Rosalynn, First Lady From Plains, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1984.

Mazlish, Bruce and Edwin Diamond, Jimmy Carter, A Character Portrait, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979.

Stapleton, Ruth Carter, Brother Billy, New York: Harper and Row, 1978.

E. Supplemental Material: The attached schematic site plan was prepared by the Historic American Buildings Survey from a 1981 real property tax assessment card at the Tax Assessor's Office, Sumter County Courthouse, Americus, Georgia. Changes made to the site since 1981 have been added to show basically the current arrangement of the site. The buildings are not necessarily drawn to scale.

Prepared by: Elizabeth Barthold
Project Historian
National Park Service
Summer 1989



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